

UNITED STATES CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION
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DEPARTMENTAL CIRCULAR NO. 836

TO HEADS OF DEPARTMENTS AND INDEPENDENT ESTABLISHMENTS

SUBJECT: FORMAT AND DISTRIBUTION OF PROPOSED OCCUPATIONAL STANDARDS

NOTE: This circular asks for your opinions on problems involved in the proposed merger of classification and qualification standards. A reply is requested within 8 weeks of receipt of the circular.

In recent months studies looking to improvements in the format and distribution of the standards issuances have been conducted by the Commission's staff, working closely with the Standards Committee of the Interagency Advisory Group. On May 19 the Interagency Advisory Group approved recommendations that classification and qualification standards be merged into one printed document on 7 7/8 x 10 1/4 pages, to be known as occupational standards. The purpose of this circular is to point out some of the problems involved in this proposal and to obtain your views on the best ways of solving them.

A. Page size of new occupational standards

1. Background discussion

Qualification standards in Handbook X-118 are printed on 7 7/8 x 10 1/4 pages, in two columns. Classification standards are printed across the page on 5 7/8 x 9 1/8 pages. The X-118 arrangement increases the number of words per page by about 50% over the 5 7/8 by 9 1/8 page. The double column format is easier to read, and the larger page size is better for printing charts when that method of presentation is desirable. Substantial savings in shelf space would eventually result from adoption of the larger page.

On the other hand, a transition to the larger size would take a period of 5 or more years to complete, during which two sets of binders of different size would be needed (i.e., for the old classification standards and the new occupational standards). The present investment in small-sized binders for classification standards would be lost although by the end of another 5 years most of them would have served long enough to justify their initial cost.

2. Questions

The Commission would appreciate your opinions on the following questions:

A-1 Does your agency favor the 7 7/8 x 10 1/4 page size for the occupational standards?

A-2 Do you see any particular problems involved in making the transition in addition to those indicated in the discussion above?

B. Combination of classification and qualification standards

1. Background discussion

In discussing this subject many persons have recommended that classification and qualification standards be merged into one printed document, but have urged that they should be printed in parts that can be separately distributed and filed. Obviously if most offices will follow such a practice it would be pointless to go to the expense and trouble of combining the two types of standards in the first place.

An alternate procedure would be to print future classification standards on the large page size (like Handbook X-118). Then anyone who wished to have a set of combined standards could readily make up his own.

2. Questions

B-1 Do you recommend merging classification and qualification standards into one printed document? or

B-2 Do you recommend printing classification standards separately on the same page size as Handbook X-118 so that anyone who desired could make up his own combined standards?

B-3 Are there any better alternatives?

C. Relationship of Handbook X-118 to the proposed new occupational standards

1. Background discussion

Handbook X-118 has a circulation of nearly 14,000 copies while classification standards have a circulation of nearly 9,000 copies. Since there is probably not too much overlapping in circulation, the proposed combined occupational standards might have a circulation as high as 18,000 or 20,000.

When the new occupational standards system is in full swing, it would seem that the publication of Handbook X-118 could be discontinued. All employment and placement officers who now use X-118 would have sets of the new occupational standards.

On the other hand, depending on the distribution method adopted (see D below), this could mean that each employment office would have a "5-foot shelf of books" in place of X-118, which is now one medium-sized volume. This would be so because the great bulk of the new occupational standards would consist primarily of classification information rather than employment and placement information.

Many Federal offices which have employment authority do not have classification authority. Ideally, each employment or placement officer should have

the classification standards applying to the jobs he is responsible for, just as each classifier should have the qualification standards for the jobs he is classifying. As a practical matter, however, it might be desirable to continue the publication of X-118, which would include only the qualification standards extracted from the occupational standards. The amount of duplicate printing involved would not be serious, since the X-118 standard for each series usually takes only from one to three pages.

A related problem involves the occupational coverage of X-118. At present this volume is limited to qualification standards for government-wide positions under the Classification Act. Classification standards, on the other hand, also include positions unique to one department, such as tax collector and immigrant inspector. If X-118 is continued in addition to the occupational standards system, possibly it should include qualification standards for all jobs for which occupational standards are issued.

2. Questions

C-1 Do you favor continuing the publication of X-118 as a convenience to employment and placement staffs after the new occupational standards system is in full operation?

C-2 If so, should X-118 be expanded to include qualification standards for jobs unique to one department or agency, when these are issued in the occupational standards system?

D. Proposal for selective distribution of the new occupational standards.

1. Background discussion

Classification standards are sold by the Government Printing Office chiefly by annual subscriptions (\$2.00 for the current fiscal year, with a 25% discount on orders of 100 or more delivered to the same address). Each subscriber receives a quarterly printing, composed of the transmittal sheet and several new or revised standards for series of positions under the Classification Act. In addition, the Superintendent of Documents stocks a limited number of each quarterly printing for general sale, with prices ranging from \$.15 to \$1.00 per printing.

Under the present arrangement it is not possible to obtain from the Superintendent of Documents the standards for any one series (e.g. Stenographer) without also obtaining several other series which happened to appear in the same printing.

Nearly 9,000 sets of classification standards are printed. Except for a relatively small number bought by libraries, state and local governments, and business and labor organizations, these standards are distributed to the offices of Federal departments and agencies throughout the world, where they are usually maintained in complete sets. A set of current standards in binders occupies about 50 inches of shelf space and weighs about 60 pounds. Most offices seldom or never use a large number of standards in the complete set.

The facts given above seem to lead to the conclusion that a system of selective distribution of the new occupational standards in place of a "blanket" distribution like that used today for classification standards would achieve worthwhile economies. Fewer copies would have to be printed originally, mailing expenses would be reduced, filing and maintenance costs would be lower, fewer binders would be needed, and less shelf space would be required.

On the other hand, agency headquarters would be put to considerable extra trouble in making up a selective distribution scheme for each new or revised occupational standard. An increase in printing costs would be required by these special arrangements in place of a blanket system.

We are advised by the Government Printing Office that a system along the following lines could be adopted:

1. Departments and agencies could continue to order blanket subscriptions for all new or revised standards as at present from the Superintendent of Documents. They might want to do this in order to maintain a few complete reference sets in the personnel offices at headquarters and for major organizational components.
2. In addition, they would be given an opportunity to ride the Commission's requisition for any of the individual series standards currently being ordered for printing, within the time limit set (about two months). The agency headquarters would decide how many copies of each new or revised series standard to order and would notify the Government Printing Office accordingly. The agency would be responsible for internal distribution of the printed copies when received. The Government Printing Office would submit a separate bill to agency headquarters for each standard ordered in this way.

In addition to the economies suggested above, this plan would facilitate distribution of occupational standards to operating officials, supervisors, and employees if the agency desired to make such distributions. That is, enough extra copies could be ordered of new standards of major importance to the agency to put them in the hands of line management as far down the line as desired.

Despite the apparent economies listed above, it may be that the extra planning and distribution work required of agency headquarters would so far offset any savings that the plan should not be adopted. In other words, the present blanket distribution scheme, although wasteful in some ways, may be the truest economy by simplifying administration.

In this case it might be desirable to urge small field stations to discard standards that obviously will never be needed by the activity rather than give them binder and shelf space and clerical maintenance service. An alternative might be the informal exchange of standards by local offices, i.e., a Forest Service office sends tax collector standards to an Internal Revenue Service office in exchange for forester standards. A further alternative would be to send

surplus standards to Civil Service Commission regional offices for future use by new or expanding agencies.

2. Questions

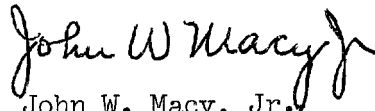
Since these are matters of primary concern to the using agencies, your opinions are requested on the following specific questions:

D-1 Would your department or agency use the selective distribution system outlined above? Are any modifications desirable?

D-2 In case the present blanket distribution system is continued, would it be desirable to reduce the number of complete sets of standards maintained in your agency? If so, how should surplus standards be disposed of - destroyed, exchanged with other offices, transferred to the Civil Service Commission, or other ways?

D-3 Do you have any other comments suggested by the discussion given above?

Your replies to these questions and any other comments or suggestions on the proposal outlined in this letter should be sent to the Standards Division, Room 105 Main Building, within eight weeks of receipt of this circular.


John W. Macy, Jr.
Executive Director

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